



STATE OF WASHINGTON
WASHINGTON STATE BOARD OF HEALTH
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News Release

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More Newborn Screenings, Routine HIV Tests for Pregnant Women Top State Board of Health Agenda

Wednesday, May 8, 9:15 a.m.–4:30 p.m., Public Health Laboratory, 1610 NE 150th St., Shoreline

Any time a baby is born in Washington State, a small blood spot arrives at the Public Health Laboratory, a state Department of Health facility in Shoreline. There, technicians screen it for four genetic disorders that, undetected, could result in serious illness, disability, or death. On May 8, the Washington State Board of Health will convene at the laboratory to hear a report from the Newborn Screening Advisory Committee (NSAC), which will recommend that the Board add tests for another six disorders to the list of mandatory screenings.

The NSAC will recommend screenings for six conditions that, combined, effect an estimated 250 infants a year in Washington State. They all can be treated if detected early. Symptoms range from hearing loss to mental retardation to liver damage to convulsions, and some of the conditions are often fatal. Most of the recommended screenings have become available only recently as a result of advances in genetic medicine.

Five of the screenings would require laboratory analysis of blood spots. The other would be hospital-based screening for early hearing loss. Early hearing loss is the most common birth defect and afflicts approximately 240 infants a year in Washington. Early detection and intervention of hearing loss can increase speech and language skills and reduce social, psychological and academic problems.

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The Board will also hold a public hearing on a proposed rule change that would make HIV testing for pregnant women more routine. The change would allow Washington to implement national recommendations intended to reduce the likelihood that mothers might unwittingly transmit the virus to their children. State law prohibits mandatory HIV testing.

Board members will also hear from organizations that have been working to increase the number of people of color pursuing health careers. In May 2000, the Board issued a report that documented how severely racial and ethnic minorities are under-represented in the state's health care workforce and underserved by its health care delivery system.

Other agenda items include an update about efforts to address school indoor air quality issues, as well as consideration of a work plan for improving nutrition and increasing physical activity for children.

Copies of the agenda and related materials are available by contacting the Board of Health at (360) 236-4110 or by visiting the Board's Web site at www.doh.wa.gov/sboh/.

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<p>The State Board of Health serves the citizens of Washington by working to understand and prevent disease across the entire population. Established in 1889 by the State Constitution, the Board provides leadership by suggesting public health policies and actions, by regulating certain activities, and by providing a public forum. The governor appoints ten members who fill three-year terms. Visit the board's Web site at www.doh.wa.gov/sboh/.</p>
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